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Being a Vegetarian is a Bit Difficult in Japan

Learn how to use Japanese verbs in the non-past negative form

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Dialogue - Japanese

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Kanji | English | Rōmaji | All

(At dinner)
A: いただきます。
B: あれ？ちえみさん、にく、きらい ですか。
C: すみません。にくは ちょっと・・・。
D: ちえみは にくを たべません。
B: ・・・ベジタリアン？
D: はい。ちえみは ベジタリアンです。
B: ああ、なるほど！

Vocabulary

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☐ ☑ English Kana Rōmaji

☐ **たべません** [たべません] 1 EXAMPLE
don't eat; masu form (negative)
わたしはさかなをたべません。
I don't eat fish.

☐ **にく** [にく] 1 EXAMPLE
meat, flesh
にくがだいすきです。
I love meat.

☐ **ちょっと** [ちょっと] 2 EXAMPLES
a bit, a little
ちょっと、すみません。
Excuse me for a minute.
私は日本語をちょっと話します。
I speak a little Japanese.

☐ **たべます** [たべます] 1 EXAMPLE
to eat;V2
にくをたべます。
I eat meat.

☐ **あれ？** [あれ？] 1 EXAMPLE
Huh? Hmm?
あれ？これ、なに？
Huh? What's this?

☐ **ベジタリアン** [べじたりあん] 1 EXAMPLE
Vegetarians
わたしはベジタリアンです。
I am a vegetarian.

☐ **いただきます。** [いただきます] 1 EXAMPLE
expression of gratitude before meals; let's eat
いただきます！
(Phrase said before eating a meal)

☐ **みんな** [みんな] 1 EXAMPLE
everyone, everybody
私はみんながだいすきです。
I love everyone.

☐ **きらい** [きらい] 1 EXAMPLE
to dislike;Adj(na)
ぼくはとうがらしがきらいです。
I hate hot chillies.

☐ **ビーガン** [びーがん] 1 EXAMPLE
vegan
ビーガンはにくをたべません。
A vegan doesn't eat meat.

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Lesson Notes

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Lesson Focus

The Focus of This Lesson Is Talking about NOT Doing Actions to Objects Using Negative Verbs.
ちえみ は にく を たべません。
Chiemi wa niku o tabemasen.
"Chiemi doesn't eat meat."

In this lesson, you'll use the structure you learned in the previous lesson to make negative sentences and to be able to say that you don't do something to a given object.

Polite Negative Forms of Verbs

You've already learned how to make polite *-masu* verbs. Now we'll look at how to turn these into negative verbs so you can express ideas such as "don't eat," "don't watch," "don't listen," etc.

It's really easy! All you need to do is take off the *-masu* ending of the verb and replace it with *-masen*.

Formation

v-*masu* -> v-*masen*

For Example:

MEANING	NON-PAST	NON-PAST NEGATIVE
"to eat"	たべます *tabemasu* "eat"	たべません *tabemasen* "don't eat"
"to drink"	のみます *nomimasu* "drink"	のみません *nomimasen* "don't drink"
"to buy"	かいます *kaimasu* "buy"	かいません *kaimasen* "don't buy"
"to go"	いきます *ikimasu* "go"	いきません *ikimasen* "don't go"
"to come"	きます *kimasu* "come"	きません *kimasen* "don't come"

"I don't drink alcohol."

To state that you don't do something (such as "don't drink alcohol," "don't eat meat," "don't watch TV," etc.), you simply use the structure we learned in the previous lesson, but you replace the verb with a *-masen* negative verb.

Formation

[Person] *wa* [thing] *o* [verb-*masen*] → "[Person] doesn't [verb] [thing]."

As always, if the person who is the subject of the sentence is already known by the listener, you don't need to keep saying **[Person] *wa*.**

For Example:

1. わたしはさかなをたべません。
   Watashi wa sakana o tabemasen.
   "I don't eat fish."
2. むすめはやさいをたべません。
   Musume wa yasai o tabemasen.
   "My daughter doesn't eat vegetables."
3. たなかさんはテレビをみますか。
   いいえ。みません。
   A: *Tanaka-san wa terebi o mimasu ka.*
   B: *Iie. Mimasen.*
   A: "Do you watch TV, Ms. Tanaka?"
   B: "No, I don't."

Reference

Please also review the following Grammar Points.

- *Itadakimasu* → Absolute Beginner Season 1 Lesson 11
- *...ga kirai desu* → Absolute Beginner Season 1 Lesson 18
- *Sumimasen* → Absolute Beginner Season 1 Lesson 13
- Talking about doing an action (verbs) → Absolute Beginner Season 1 Lesson 21
- Asking about doing an action (verbs in question sentences) → Absolute Beginner Season 1 Lesson 22

Key Vocabulary & Phrases

★～はちょっと。。。(～ *wa chotto...*)
This is a phrase that sums up the Japanese culture of restraint perfectly! It literally means "[something] is a little...," but what it really means is that the speaker does not like, does not want, or is troubled by what the speaker is talking about.

For example, *guroi eiga wa chotto...* literally translates as "gory movies are a little..." but actually means that the speaker does not like gory movies and perhaps does not want to say this directly in case someone in the group does like them and might be offended.

★ベジタリアン (*bejitarian*)
The word for "vegetarian" in Japanese is simply the English word turned into *katakana*: ベジタリアン. Vegetarians are not common in Japan, but vegans are even less so, so the word ビーガン (*biigan)* may not be understood depending on whom you are talking to.

★ Some useful food words

JAPANESE	*ROMANIZATION*	"ENGLISH"
にく	*niku*	"meat"
さかな	*sakana*	"fish"
たまご	*tamago*	"egg"
やさい	*yasai*	"vegetables"

In Japanese, we often say some foods (particularly those considered to be staple foods) with the honorific *o-* prefix. *Niku* becomes *o-niku*, *sakana* becomes *o-sakana*, and *yasai* becomes *o-yasai*.

However, you cannot say *o-tamago*, for example, so be careful to check which foods you can use *o-* with!

Cultural Insights

Can You Eat Meat in Japan?

Meat and dairy are relatively recent introductions to the Japanese diet, only dating back to the influence of Western missions to Japan from the late nineteenth century onward. The eating of meat was prohibited by Buddhist teachings (as well as the landscape of Japan, which is not very well suited to animal farming), and traditional Buddhist temple cuisine (called *shojin ryouri*) is one hundred percent vegan.

So, given this historical background, you would think that there are still many Japanese who follow a vegan diet, right? Wrong! Seafood has always been a huge part of the Japanese diet, and even things such as soups like *miso shiru* ("miso soup") are often made from bonito stock or boiled pork bones.

With the exception of practicing Buddhist monks, Japanese vegetarians are very rare, and vegans are almost nonexistent. As we heard in the dialogue, while most Japanese will know what a "vegetarian" is, the concept of veganism ("vegan" = ビーガン, *biigan*) is much less well known, and many Japanese may not know what it means.

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Grammar

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Below is a list of the grammar points introduced or used in this lesson. Click for a full explanation.

否定形 hiteikei Negative form	*Introduced*
動詞の活用（マス形） doushi no katsuyou (masu form) Conjugation of verbs (masu form)	*Used*

Lesson Transcript

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